

Remarks of Lisa Urso
French/Spanish Teacher
Regional School District #4

Before the Education Committee
On Senate Bill 24, Section 29
TOPIC: Teacher Tenure

February 21, 2012

Good afternoon Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Lisa Urso, and I'm a French and Spanish teacher in Regional School District 4. I am here today to comment on Senate Bill 24, Section 29.

Many of us are very offended by Governor Malloy's statement about teacher tenure in his State of the State Address: "All you have to do is show up for four years." I would like to tell you my story about my first four years of employment.

I started teaching in 2001, when the BEST portfolio was still required for beginning teachers. During that first year of teaching, I had to attend, throughout the school year, three different seminars in three different parts of the state in order to prepare for my portfolio. I had to attend workshops that offered tips on assessing students' work, preparing the video samples, and making sure my work reflected BEST practices of world language teaching. To attend these seminars, I often had to leave school at the same time as my students, attended classes for two to three hours, and then drove an hour back home. Once home, I still had one and a half to two hours' worth of grading papers and preparing my classes for the next day, or even the next few days.

In addition to my responsibilities inside the classroom, I was expected, as a first year teacher, to become involved in events outside of my content area. I was the costumer for the school play. I helped revise my district's world language curriculum, and also worked to create curriculum for our then-new character education program. I attended professional development outside of my district. I also started classwork towards earning a second endorsement, Spanish, on my certification.

During my second year of teaching, in addition to completing my BEST portfolio, I continued to take classes towards my Spanish certification. I attended more workshops outside of my district, continued my work with the school play, and spent a second summer working on curriculum.

During my third year of teaching, I finally started to feel more comfortable with my school routine, and I felt that I could get to know my students as people for the first time in my career. Even though I had passed my portfolio, I still felt a need to prove myself and improve my teaching skills. I chaperoned field trips, read a lot of books about teaching, and asked my colleagues questions. I observed classes whenever I could.

Now in my eleventh year of teaching. I am now a mentor with the TEAM program, and am the vice-chair of the CEA's Membership Training Conference Committee. I also serve on the Fall Conference Committee with the Connecticut Council of Language Teachers. I believe it is very important to give back to my profession. I arrive at work by 7:00 am, and leave between 5 or 5:30 PM. When I go home at night, I usually work for two hours on school work, correcting papers or planning for the next week and beyond.

I have had tenure for seven years. I have definitely worked to earn it. It took more than just showing up at my job and lecturing my students; I had to work at it, and my administrators recognized that. During my first three years of teaching, I was observed three times a year, and had to conference with my supervisor at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. I was held accountable for my work, and still am. I am actually held more accountable for my work now that I have tenure. I produce specific evidence that my students are learning, and achieving. I tie my personal goals into district goals. I work closely with my colleagues to make sure that I can help them meet their language arts, math, and even science goals. French and Spanish are two subjects that offer much opportunity for curricular integration, and I am more than happy to do my part. I feel that this is my professional obligation.

I also believe that Governor Malloy is greatly mistaken when he stated that poor teachers stay on the job for too long. Six years ago, we hired a Spanish teacher who wasn't performing effectively. In addition to the required district observations, she was evaluated by our department head and our assistant superintendent. My principal gathered feedback from parent phone calls and E-mails, from faculty members, and from me. This teacher's contract was not renewed, and she left our district at the end of the year. My district recognized that this was a situation that had to be remedied, and that there were measures in place to do so.

Finally, with respect to the five-year contracts, I think that this will cause dire consequences to many teachers across the state if this measure were to take place. I am a 36-year old single woman. Even though I only have myself to support, if salary scales were eliminated, and I were re-hired for less than what I am earning now, I would have to take a second, or maybe a third job, in order to make ends meet. I have a mortgage, condominium fees, student loans, and a car payment. If it is going to be difficult for me, imagine what the circumstances would be for one of my colleagues, a single mother who is putting two children through college. Imagine what it would be like for a married couple, both teachers, raising a family.

Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischman, please consider my testimony as you consider Senate Bill number 24. This would not help our teachers, but harm them. It would prevent many would-be teachers from entering the profession, and it may cause many aspiring teachers to seek employment outside of Connecticut. Thank you.